

# Respect Life Sunday Homily

Fr. Ben Muhlenkamp, Former Chaplain of Divine Mercy

“If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” We as a church have so much work to do in breaking down our society’s hardened hearts, and it will only happen through the love we show. A few months ago, I was out at a restaurant, and I ran into an old friend of mine. We sat down, and I got all caught up on all that she has been up to since the last time we spoke probably some 10 years earlier. As we talked I could tell that she had fallen upon some difficult times, and had found herself in some abusive relationships. And after a while she said, “So you are a priest, wow, what is that like? Is there some particular ministry you like the most”?

I proceeded to tell her that probably the greatest ministry is one I am a part of now, called Divine Mercy Ministry. I told her that another priest, Fr. Budzinski and I, during our time in seminary were involved in a post abortive ministry called Bethesda; and that it was so powerful in my life to see how much healing Christ had brought to these post-abortive women, and how their hearts had been transformed. I let her know that some of the holiest women I had ever met were women who had suffered an abortion. Then I told her that over the course of a year, Fr. Budzinski and I worked to bring this ministry here to Ft. Wayne. So with the assistance of a psychologist and a couple of exceptionally caring post-abortive women, we formed this group.

I told her all about the ministry, and how these women who have suffered abortion experiences come together in a group setting and begin unpacking how this experience has shaped their lives. And while I was describing this ministry, she interrupted me and she said, “Wait, I thought you Catholics don’t associate with women who have had abortions?” Immediately my heart sank, because I realized that that is probably what a lot of Americans believe. I looked back at her and I said, no, our job as a Church isn’t to judge these women, we as a Church love these women who have experienced an abortion, and we know that abortion hurts women, and so we do everything we can to help prevent them from choosing the quick fix that will cause long lasting pain in their future. Then she said, “Really, is it expensive?” “No, I told her, it meets a couple times a month and it’s absolutely free.” Then she said, “Do you have a card or something; I would really like to reach out to a group like that.” Wow, that was a divinely orchestrated encounter, and in that moment my heart was both broken for her, and rejoicing for her, that she found a place where healing in her heart could begin.

I have to say, that as a Priest, since this group has begun meeting, my heart has been expanded, and I have just wanted to show so much love to these suffering women who have had the courage to come and open their hearts to one another. Their stories have really helped me understand both what leads a woman to have an abortion, and also, what happens in the heart and mind of a woman who has suffered a loss like this. So often a woman goes to the clinic scared, looking for a quick fix, and it doesn’t work out that way. The guilt comes flooding in, and then they try to build walls around their heart, and try to ignore the hurt. They often begin to blame themselves for everything bad that happens to them, and feel like they deserve to suffer. They have anger toward others, themselves, and most of all they can’t forgive themselves; they can’t imagine that God could really forgive them. Lastly, they don’t think that their child, who we trust

is already in the fathers loving care, could forgive them. Often it isn't until they are in their late 30's that they can't ignore their decision anymore, and they finally open up and tell someone. This ministry helps women to process what happened in their lives, what led them to the clinic doors, and slowly through this process, they do start to realize that their child isn't up there hating them, and that their heavenly Father isn't up there hating them either. Rather they start to see that they have a Father that loves them, and wants to be reconciled to them. Before you know it these women begin to forgive themselves.

What has been surprising to me is that many of the women that I have listened to have felt like it was their only option and some of them were pushed into doing it by a boyfriend or one of their parents. One woman was told by her mother, "I am not going to allow you to ruin your life the way I ruined mine; get in the car." As I have listened to these personal testimonies, I have looked for connections, seeing if there are any similarities between these women's lives, and I have found one. I have yet to meet a woman who has suffered an abortion experience, who had had a good relationship with her dad, that is if they knew their dad at all. Many of them had either an emotionally absent, cruel, uncaring father, or just no father at all. Dads, you hold all the cards in the life of your daughters. If we want to change things in our culture, it begins with you fathers showing your daughters how much you love them; and also, you need them to know that no matter what they do, you love them, and will not give up on them. Also, if dad isn't around, you mothers, I can't emphasize enough how important it is that you find a positive male role model like a grandfather or uncle for your children. While I am talking about men, I just want to add that I have met many men who have suffered the pain of lost fatherhood; so abortion is not something that just affects women. I have heard several men say, "My girlfriend said she needed money to get this taken care of, and while it seemed okay at the time, later it left me feeling guilty, and caused destructive behavior in my life."

If you or someone you know has suffered an abortion experience, please feel free to grab a card in the back of Church or Bathroom and contact our coordinator, or even feel free to send me an e-mail, and I would love to sit down and talk with you. Christ's love can penetrate deeper than your hurt, deeper than your pain, he penetrates right to the depths of your heart, and can bring about the healing that you so long to experience. This is not a quick process, but I can assure you that from the moment you arrive till the moment you leave you will feel loved and supported by the women there, and also by us group chaplains.

On this pro-life Sunday, I am here to urge all of you to keep up your prayers for the end of abortion. We are making progress on this front, in just the past year so far 44 abortion clinics have closed in America. We have to continue to pray for a culture of life, and if any of you know someone who is in a crisis pregnancy, the best thing you can do is to remember not to criticize them, but encourage them, let them know that they do have what it takes to carry this pregnancy through until birth. So often these women have no hope. I can tell you there are so many good families who would adopt; even my own sister and her husband are looking for a child to adopt. Let us ask the Divine Physician to come and break down our cultures hardened hearts so that we can become "lovers of life".